

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 HA-05 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 NEA-10 IO-13 /089 W
-----115831 041042Z /10
R 041018Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4077
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LENINGRAD 00701

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, UR, US
SUBJ: MATZOH AVAILABILITY IN LENINGRAD

REF: STATE 053256

1. SUMMARY: CONGENOFF RECENTLY VISITED SYNAGOGUE HERE
TO BUY MATZOH, OBSERVED MATZOH-MAKING, STORAGE, TALKED
WITH SYNAGOGUE OFFICIALS. MATZOH BEING MADE AND SOLD
FREELY AT LENINGRAD SYNAGOGUE. END SUMMARY.

2. CONGENOFF VISITED SYNAGOGUE ON LATE FEBRUARY WEEKDAY,
OBSERVED LIGHT TO MODERATE MATZOH SALES. SYNAGOGUE
OFFICIALS AND MATZOH MAKERS INFORMED HIM SALES UNDERWAY
HERE SINCE MID-JANUARY, EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TILL MID-
APRIL. THEY CLAIM TO PRODUCE ALMOST ONE METRIC TON
MATZOH DAILY AND EXPECT TO PRODUCE AND SELL ABOUT 70 TONS
TO ABOUT 12,000 CUSTOMERS THIS YEAR. MATZOH IS MADE
FROM FLOUR PURCHASED BY SYNAGOGUE AND IS SOLD AT RUBLES
2.20 PER KILO IN TWO- OR THREE-KILO PACKAGES.
UNOFFICIAL INFORMANTS TELL US PRICE LAST YEAR WAS TWO
RUBLES PER KILO, STILL CHEAPER BEFORE THAT. SYNAGOGUE
CLAIMS MATZOH SALES CONSTITUTE MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME
FOR ENTIRE YEAR. ALTHOUGH PURCHASING IS LIGHT AT PRESENT,
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OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT BY LATER IN MARCH THERE WILL BE LONG
LINES. CASUAL OBSERVATION REVEALED THAT CUSTOMERS SEEMED
TO BE YOUNGER, ON AVERAGE, THAN TYPICAL SYNAGOGUE
CONGREGATION AT HIGH HOLY DAYS. NO OVERT POLICE
SURVEILLANCE OF PURCHASERS' COMINGS AND GOING WAS NOTED.

3. OFFICIALS WERE HAPPY TO SHOW CONGENOFF MATZOH PRO-

DUCTION. BAKERY LOCATED IN SYNAGOGUE BASEMENT. EQUIPMENT INCLUDES ROLLER PRESS DEVICE FOR KNEADING AND SHAPING DOUGH INTO LONG STRIPS. STRIPS OF DOUGH FED THROUGH OTHER MACHINE WHICH MAKES TYPICAL PERFORATED LINES (PURPOSE OF WHICH WAS EXPLAINED AS TO KEEP MATZOH FROM RISING DURING BAKING). PERFORATED DOUGH CUT BY HAND INTO MATZOH-SIZED PIECES, DRAPED OVER APPROXIMATELY TEN-FOOT-LONG WOODEN POLES AND INSERTED INTO LOW, WIDE MOUTH OF DEEP, WOOD-FIRED OVEN WHERE IT IS BAKED APPROXIMATELY TWO MINUTES, THEN REMOVED WITH LONG BAKERS' SHOVELS. MATZOH BAKED UNDER SUPERVISION OF OLD MAN WHO CERTIFIES ITS BEING KOSHER FOR PASSOVER. FINISHED MATZOH WEIGHED, PACKED AND STORED IN OTHER ROOMS. MAIN STORAGE AREA VERY LARGE, AND FILLED WITH PACKAGES AWAITING CUSTOMERS. ONE MAN KEPT BUSY MILLING FINISHED MATZOH TO MANUFACTURE "MATZOH MEAL," THE ONLY FLOUR OBSERVANT JEWS PERMITTED TO BAKE WITH DURING PASSOVER WEEK. (IT IS ALSO MAIN INGREDIENT OF "KNEIDLACH" OR "MATZOH BALLS," WHICH, WE SUSPECT, IS WHAT MOST OF IT WILL BE TURNED INTO BY LOCAL PURCHASERS, FEW OF WHOM ABLE TO MAINTAIN KOSHER HOMES.)

4. SYNAGOGUE OFFICIALS REPORT APPROXIMATELY FORTY PEOPLE, BOTH JEWS AND RUSSIANS, ENGAGED IN MATZOH MAKING AND SELLING. THEY ARE "REGULARS," CONGENOFF TOLD, WHO COME BACK YEAR AFTER YEAR TO DO THIS. MANY ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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PENSIONERS, BUT SOME OBVIOUSLY QUITE YOUNG AND INQUIRY REVEALED THEY DO THIS WORK DURING VACATION FROM REGULAR JOBS. MATZOH MAKERS, IT SEEMS, MAKE MORE THAN ONE KIND OF DOUGH. SYNAGOGUE OFFICIALS CLAIM TYPICAL SALARY FOR THIS WORK IS 400-500 RUBLES MONTHLY, APPROXIMATELY THREE TIMES AVERAGE WAGE.

5. THIS YEAR LAST IN WHICH CURRENT WOOD BURNING OVEN TO BE EMPLOYED. WORK CURRENTLY GOING ON IN UPSTAIRS ROOM TO ASSEMBLE AND INSTALL GAS-FIRED OVEN. INSTALLATION, SYNAGOGUE HOPES, WILL PERMIT WORK FORCE REDUCTION. IT WILL ALSO QUOTE REDUCE THE SMOKE UNQUOTE. THOUGH OFFICIALS WERE NOT SPECIFIC IN SUGGESTING OFFICIAL PRESSURE TO REDUCE POLLUTION OF NEIGHBORHOOD ATMOSPHERE, CONGENOFF CAME AWAY WITH IMPRESSION THEY AWARE THEY COULD NOT GO ON DOING THIS FOREVER AND WERE TRYING TO FORESTALL ANY MATZOH-MAKING RESTRICTIONS BY AUTHORITIES BASED ON ENVIRONMENTAL GROUNDS. ENVIRONMENTAL AND, PERHAPS, POLITICAL GOOD SENSE DO NOT, HOWEVER, ALWAYS COINCIDE WITH GUSTATORY DELIGHT. WOOD-BAKED MATZOH IS TASTIEST REPORTING OFFICER HAS EVER ENCOUNTERED, ALSO HAS APPEALING HOME-MADE LOOK.

6. COMMENT: MATZOH-MAKING AND SELLING, AT LEAST IN LENINGRAD, APPEARS QUITE UNRESTRICTED. UNOFFICIAL SOURCE CONFIRMED EXISTENCE OF LONG LINES OF PURCHASERS AS HOLIDAY APPROACHES. SYNAGOGUE OFFICIALS TOLD CONGENOFF THEY SEND SAMPLES TO CONGREGATIONS IN U.S., ISRAEL AND OTHER COUNTRIES, THUS UNDERLINING WHAT IN OUR OPINION IS AUTHORITIES' MOTIVATION IN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LENINGRAD 00701

PERMITTING FREE SALE OF MATZOH: NEED TO MOLLIFY FOREIGN FOREIGN OPINION. INTERESTINGLY, SEVERAL SOURCES REPORT IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN POSSIBLE TO BUY MATZOH IN LENINGRAD, THOUGH AT ONE TIME IT WAS INDEED NECESSARY TO PROVIDE OWN FLOUR. AS TO RECEIPT OF MATZOH FROM ABROAD, SYNAGOGUE OFFICIAL CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN TELEPHONED BY A RABBI TEITZ OF ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY, WHO INFORMED HIM HE WAS DISPATCHING TO LENINGRAD SHIPMENT OF SPECIAL MATZOH, PRIZED IN U.S. AS "SUPER KOSHER" BY ULTRA-ORTHODOX JEWS. EVEN IF THIS SHIPMENT ARRIVES, HOWEVER, IT HARDLY CONSTITUTES DENT IN SOVIET AUTHORITIES' BAN ON MOST MATZOH IMPORTS. REAL IMPACT OF IMPORT BAN CAN ONLY BE FELT IN OUTLYING AREAS WHERE THEY ARE NO FUNCTIONING SYNAGOGUES, LET ALONE LOCAL MATZOH BAKING. ON THIS SCORE SYNAGOGUE OFFICIALS EVASIVE. THEY GAVE NO INDICATION HOW MUCH OF THEIR TOTAL SALES WOULD BE CONSUMED BY OUT OF TOWN PURCHASERS, NOR WERE THEY ABLE SHED MUCH LIGHT ON AREAS FROM WHICH SUCH PURCHASERS MIGHT COME. ALL THEY SAID WAS THAT THEY MAKE NO ACTUAL SHIPMENTS. IF PEOPLE FROM ELSEWHERE WANT TO BUY LENINGRAD MATZOH, THEY MUST COME HERE TO DO SO. HOWEVER, THEY

NOTED, SITUATION HERE BETTER THAN IN MOSCOW, WHERE MATZOH
RATIONED TO CERTAIN NUMBER OF KILOS (FOUR, AS WE RECALL)
PER CUSTOMER. NO SUCH RESTRICTION EXISTS IN
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LENINGRAD, CONGENOFF WAS ASSURED. IN FACT, HE WAS TOLD
SOTTO VOCE, LOCAL DEMAND HAS BEEN FALLING OFF IN RECENT
YEARS AS MORE AND MORE TRADITIONALLY MINDED JEWS
EMIGRATE OR DIE OFF. END COMMENT. BUCHANAN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: JEWS, SUPPLIES, RELIGION, FLOUR, COMMEMBRATIVE CELEBRATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LENING00701
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780099-0325
Format: TEL
From: LENINGRAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197803106/aaaadmhf.tel
Line Count: 183
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b44d7bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 53256
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3116829
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MATZOH AVAILABILITY IN LENINGRAD
TAGS: SHUM, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b44d7bb8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014